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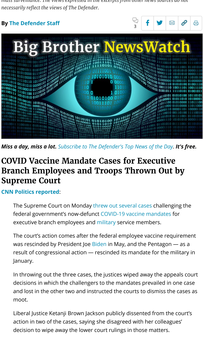
COVID Vaccine Mandate Cases for Executive Branch Employees and Troops Thrown Out by Supreme Court + More

The Defender's Big Brother NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to governments' abuse of power, including attacks on democracy, civil liberties and use of mass surveillance. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff



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COVID Vaccine Mandate Cases for Executive Branch Employees and Troops Thrown Out by Supreme Court

CNN Politics reported:

The Supreme Court on Monday threw out several cases challenging the federal government's now-defunct COVID-19 vaccine mandates for executive branch employees and military service members.

The court's action comes after the federal employee vaccine requirement was rescinded by President Joe Biden in May, and the Pentagon — as a result of congressional action — rescinded its mandate for the military in January.

In throwing out the three cases, the justices wiped away the appeals court decisions in which the challengers to the mandates prevailed in one case and lost in the other two and instructed the courts to dismiss the cases as moot.

Liberal Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson publicly dissented from the court's action in two of the cases, saying she disagreed with her colleagues' decision to wipe away the lower court rulings in those matters.

DNA Companies Should Receive Severe Penalties for Losing Our Data

TechCrunch reported:

Personal data is the new gold. The recent 23andMe data breach is a stark reminder of a chilling reality — our most intimate, personal information might not be as secure as we think. It's a damning indictment of the sheer negligence of companies that, while profiting from our DNA, are failing to protect it.

The 23andMe breach saw hackers gaining access to a whopping 6.9 million users' personal information, including family trees, birth years and geographic locations. It brings to the fore a few significant questions: Are companies really doing enough to protect our data? Should we trust them with our most intimate information?

Companies are promising to keep our data safe, but there are a couple of quirks here. Government overreach is certainly a possibility, as the FBI and every policing agency in the world are probably just a few thoughts off of getting access to such a huge dataset of DNA sequences. It could be a gold mine for every cold case from here to the South Pole.

The audacity of 23andMe, and companies like it, is astounding. They pitch themselves as guardians of our genetic history, as the gatekeepers of our ancestral pasts and potential medical futures. But when the chips are down and our data is leaked, they hide behind the old 'we were not hacked; it was the users' old passwords" excuse.

Tennis Star Novak Djokovic Reiterates Stance on Vaccines: 'I'm Pro-Freedom to Choose'

Fox News reported:

Novak Djokovic is the number one tennis player in the world at 36 years old, tallying 24 Grand Slam titles over his illustrious career, which does not seem to be coming to an end anytime soon.

Through all the success though, Djokovic was cast as a villain in recent years for his decision not to get the COVID-19 vaccination.

Despite the backlash, he has remained steadfast in his belief that he does not have to get the vaccine. In September, Djokovic spoke with tennis great John McEnroe about his stance, though it was not the mindset people believed he had.

Djokovic said he was not "anti-vax," but rather "pro-freedom to choose" whether a person wants to get the vaccine or not.

Despite Mounting Mental Health Concerns, Teens Remain Heavy Social Media Users

Mashable reported:

Despite growing worry that social media use can harm youth mental health, teens still use major platforms at high rates, according to a new survey conducted by Pew Research Center. About half the respondents characterized their use as "almost constant."

The online survey of 1,453 U.S. teens between the ages of 13 and 17 was conducted this fall, months after the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy issued an advisory warning that social media can pose a "profound risk of harm" to youth.

Dr. Laura Erickson-Schroth, chief medical officer of The Jed Foundation, did not review the findings prior to publication but said that social media platforms remain vital for teens.

In general, teens are also at a key developmental stage in which they're seeking validation and recognition, Erickson-Schroth said. Social media platforms can take advantage of those needs by inviting them to regularly post text, pictures, and videos with the hope that friends and strangers alike will find them funny, smart, attractive, charming, or clever. That incentive also makes it harder to quit social media.

When Will A.I. Be Smart Enough to Thwart Violence?

Slate reported:

Our world has long been filled with cameras peering out over streets, malls, and schools. Many have been recording for years. But for the most part, no one ever looks at the footage. These little devices, perched on shelves and poles, exist primarily to create a record. If something happens and someone wants to learn more, they can go back.

Due to advances in artificial intelligence, the point of the security camera is undergoing a radical transformation. Over the past few years, a growing number of buzzy startups and long-standing security camera companies have begun offering customers — ranging from Fortune 500 companies to corner markets — abilities long limited primarily to billion-dollar border surveillance systems. Their capacities range dramatically. But they all way past motion detection. Unlike their predecessors, they most definitely know the difference between a person and a car.

More significantly, many of these systems promise to instantaneously flag or even predict certain types of activity based on what a person is holding, whether a face seems to match a photo of a specific individual, and other clues flagged by A.I. tools predicting the likelihood of "suspicious acts."

In other words, millions of cameras in public and private spaces throughout the country are currently pivoting from documentary receptacles into digital security guards. And because most of the physical cameras were already there, this shift may pass largely unnoticed. You've probably missed much of what's happened already.

BJC Reinstates Employee Mask Requirement in Response to Uptick in Virus Cases

St.Louis Post-Dispatch reported:

BJC HealthCare will reinstate a mask requirement for employees, effective Wednesday, in response to rising virus cases in the community.

The health system said in a statement Saturday that it will institute temporary, heightened mask requirements from time to time when infection rates are particularly high and will loosen the requirements when appropriate. Beginning Wednesday, employees will be required to wear masks in patient care areas.

Though reported case rates of COVID-19 are still well below the waves of the first two years of the pandemic, the region has seen an uptick recently. St. Louis County reported a seven-day average of 157 new cases, as of Tuesday, up from 68 in early November.

Ex-Commissioner for Facial Recognition Tech Joins Facewatch Firm He Approved

The Guardian reported:

The recently deported watchdog in charge of monitoring facial recognition technology has joined the private firm he controversially approved, paving the way for the mass roll-out of biometric surveillance cameras in high streets across the country.

In a move critics have dubbed an "outrageous conflict of interest", Professor Fraser Sampson, former biometrics and surveillance camera commissioner, has joined Facewatch as a non-executive director.

Facewatch uses biometric cameras to check faces against a watch list and, despite widespread concern over the technology, has received backing from the Home Office, and has already been introduced in hundreds of high-street shops and supermarkets.

There's a Big Catch in the EU's Landmark New AI Law

Axios reported:

The European Union's comprehensive AI regulations, finalized Friday after a 36-hour negotiating marathon, come with a catch: The EU is stuck in a legal void until 2025, when the rules come into force. Why it matters: As the first global power to pass comprehensive AI legislation, the EU is once again setting what could become worldwide regulatory standards — much as it did on digital privacy rules — but the transition could be bumpy.

Because the law will not be in force until 2025, the EU will urge companies to begin voluntarily following the rules in the interim. But there are no penalties if they don't. The hiatus leaves plenty of room for the U.S. or others to undercut the EU's plans before they go into effect by, for instance, implementing less restrictive rules before Europe's kick in.

Details: The EU law bans several uses of AI, including bulk scraping of facial images and most emotion recognition systems in workplace and educational settings. There are safety exceptions — such as using AI to detect a driver falling asleep.

The new law also bans controversial "social scoring" systems — efforts to evaluate the compliance or trustworthiness of citizens. It restricts facial recognition technology in law enforcement to a handful of acceptable uses, including identification of victims of terrorism, human trafficking and kidnapping.

Apple Is on Track to Be the First $4 Trillion Company by the End of 2024, Wedbush Says

Insider reported:

Apple is on track to notch a $4 trillion valuation by the end of next year — the first-ever company on the stock market to do so, according to Wedbush.

The investment research firm raised its price target for Apple to $250 a share from $240 previously, implying a 30% upside from Monday's price of around $192 a share.

Meanwhile, the company's market cap is currently at $2.99 trillion, after notching a historic $3 trillion valuation earlier this year.

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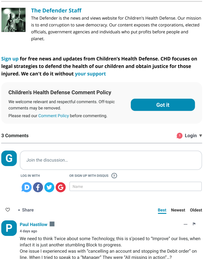
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Name...
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Best Newest Oldest
Paul Hadlow
4 days ago
We need to think Twice about some Technology this is s'posed to "improve" our lives, when in fact it's designed to Enslave and Control Block to progress
One issue I experienced was with "cancelling" an account and stopping the Debit order" on line. When I tried to speak to a "Manager" They were "All missing in action" ..!!
They are very quick to sign you up and take your Money ... But when you want to reverse the Process ...? So I cancelled my Bank account ! But be sure to keep
Copies of dates and interactions with entities who refuse Human interactions.
Now they can "Chase Me"... and I Can "Ignore them!" ! Easy peasy
Reply Share
Wendy
5 days ago
Alll is not even smart enough to transfer me to a human when I ask for an agent. It had to ask twice before it switched me over. I'm talking about the ubiquitous horrid phone systems every company on earth appears to use. I hated them years ago and hate them even more now. AI is an idiot or below.
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Worse. It is an evil idiot programmed by psychopaths.
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